

[Thank God for Columbus]

Fringe

Thank God for Columbus — Partnow

Self-portrait of WPA sewer worker with a voice and yearnings. Delightful humor of unconscious variety.

B.A.B. 11/16/39

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 W. 144 Street

DATE June 5, 1939

SUBJECT Fringe Folklore - THANK GOD FOR COLUMBUS

1. Date end time of interview May 25, 1939
2. Place of interview Foot of Canal Street bridge.

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3. Name and address of informant Sam Rosen
4. Name and address of person, if, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

A wide waste area at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge where the unemployed are sunning.
Third Avenue L, second-hand clothes shops, heavy traffic.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

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NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 W. 144th Street

DATE June 5, 1939

SUBJECT Fringe Folklore - THANK GOD FOR COLUMBUS

Yes, it's a wonderful voice. And it ain't no expense neither. A little eggnogg, some Heide's pastilles and it comes out clear like a canary. That's my nickname in the sewer - Sam, the Canary. Rough laborers, they ain't artistic and sensitive like girls, but they call me the canary, they gotta, on account of my voice. I don't mean my voice. I hate to say I, my. It's

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a born voice, that's all. It happens by accident it's mine. It's a pleasure. It's an inspiration, It gives me a good appetite, it makes me happy. Except at night - I eat two cups of coffee and supper, I feel so heavy it gets screechy. I'm too tired, it effects affects the voice, you understand. The slightest thing makes it screechy. I didn't know till three, four years ago I even had it. Nobody told me. My wife never told me. She tried to kill it, even. She was a nervous woman, irritable - a born naggard. She put me on a pedestal and made [?] an idol out of me, then she knocked me off. I got annulled.

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I went to work in the sewers for WPA. It was an accident - one day I was shovelling and I began to sing. The boys hollered for an encore. I was surprised. It was an inspiration, it put life into them. Since that time everybody calls me Bing Crosby, Juniors, because I'm an amature. Your whole life you go around, nobody tells you, nobody is decent enough, now I'm Bing Junior. How much waste. A name, Bing.

My uncle had a baby he named him Dennis. So what? The kids on the block call him Ziggy. Foolishness. My name is Sam Rosen, plain, I don't care who asks. June 6th I'm singing in Low's [Loew's?] Theater Amature Hour, shall I go and change my name. I'm a citywide amature. 501 Madison Avenue, that's [?] there, downstairs is a confectionery, they gave me an audition, they give me auditions all over, I sing in one room, they listen in another room over the microphone, the receiver, the amplifier, whatever you call it. Then when I'm through, I hear them say: "Thank you." It's an inspiration, the way they say it. "Thank you." Most of the time they ask for an encore too. It's an exhilaration, you get a better appetite, you don't feel like an appendage. Today it's so busy [?] slack everybody is demoralized. They don't know where to look. If a person looks up at the sky and somebody whispers he's a Messiah, they follow him. They don't know no better, they're looking for an inspiration. Like on Forty Second Street, let one person only look up, everybody is looking.

My inspiration, I need to serenade a girl. When I hear the call of nature, to satisfy my cravings, follow my sex nature, I need a mete. But I can't locate her. I got a good nature,

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I'm quiet not like other laborers, but since I'm annulled I can't locate my ideal. I'm going to a matrimonial bureau. A friend of mine, I 3 know him a long time, He's opening a new office now on 42nd Street, he's sending me a post card, he expects to get the American type, educated. I'm looking for a lady with a brother or a father they're in business and they'll allow me to work for them. I'm not satisfied with the girls he got now. They're fat or they're widows or they got children. Only one girl, she was slim, with a good skin, three inches taller than me, we clicked right away. But when we got through talking in the office there, I asked her telephone number, she said: "Got a steady job, I'll keep company." That ain't my ideal. Go get a steady job. At what? Fixing fountain pens?

The only thing I got to depend on is the voice. The sewer work is only ten eleven days a month so the rest of the time I go to school. I take up French, acting, I learn dancing, classical dancing, even fencing. For poise, you understand. Like a real opera singer, only it don't cost me a penny. It's WPA culture courses. It's a pleasure, an inspiration. Thank God for Columbus.